

**WINTER IS HERE! YOU'LL NEED
MORE THAN THE WEATHER
CHANNEL TO MAKE IT THROUGH**

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Winter is here. Those of us who love to watch the weather channel marvel at nature's spectacular shows.

Our relatively calm southern California climate can lull us into a false sense of security. That same old weather channel can also lull us into thinking we have the information we need to take a safe flight. This is not the case. Weather channel reports and forecasts are not for flying. They are of a more general nature and do not address some of the specific issues that can mean the difference between an adventure and a disaster.

A single-engine Piper aircraft with only the pilot on board, departed on a night cross country flight from Hayward, CA to Bermuda Dunes, CA. The pilot never arrived at his destination. The aircraft was found with the wings and empennage separated from the fuselage where it had crashed at an off airport site in Lost Hills, CA. The pilot was killed in the crash.

The NTSB concluded the probable cause of the accident was the pilot's continued visual flight rules (VFR) flight into instrument conditions. He had no recent instrument training or experience and there was no record of his obtaining a preflight or in-flight weather briefing.

A pilot in a Beech V35B intended a day/IFR cross country flight from Smith Ranch to Truckee, CA. He was advised of moderate turbulence below 18,000 feet. The freezing level was reported at 9,300 feet with expected rime icing. The single-engine Beech crashed and was destroyed. The pilot, the only person on board, was killed in the accident.

The investigation concluded that the probable cause of this accident was the pilot's intentional flight into adverse

weather conditions, his improper flight planning and decision making.

In Pensacola, FL, a Beech A36 pilot attempted an instrument approach but low clouds prevented him from landing. He requested a second instrument approach. While on a five mile final, the pilot experienced a loss of engine power. The plane collided with trees, was substantially damaged and the two people on board died.

Here, the post accident investigation revealed no fuel in the left wing tank with the fuel selector set on the left tank. A factor cited in the NTSB report was the low ceiling that existed at the time.

The pilot of a twin engine Cessna 414 filed an IFR flight plan prior to departing from an uncontrolled airport. Weather at the time was day, IFR, with a 600 foot ceiling and visibility 6 miles. Shortly after takeoff the pilot contacted approach control for his clearance. He was instructed to maintain VFR while the controller coordinated with air route traffic control center, ARTCC. Within minutes, the controller lost radar contact. The aircraft collided with upslope terrain in weather conditions of fog, sleet and snow. The accident site was about 14 miles from the departure airport. The airplane was destroyed and the two people on board were killed.

Probable cause of this accident was the pilot's VFR flight into instrument conditions, inadequate in-flight decision making and failure to maintain adequate terrain clearance. The low ceiling that existed at the time was named as a factor as well.

The weather channel is a great place to begin planning for a winter flight. You can get an overview of the large weather picture and even some interesting trend information. Maps will show the placement, movement and types of fronts out there. All this is a great beginning, but only a beginning.

The FAA and the National Weather Service provide a wide range of weather information. This data is more specific to our needs as pilots. The information you will get from a DUATS or AFSS briefing have be compiled to give you the best possible base for your decisions concerning weather and your flying plans.

Those of us who are shy can call 1 800 992-7433 (1 800 Wx Brief) and get great weather information transcribed at regular intervals by selecting the automated menu.

These recorded reports and forecasts let us repeat whatever we missed or didn't quite pick up. We can select from wide area forecasts and outlooks, route based weather forecasts or surface observations less than a hour old.

The AIM (Aeronautical Information Manual) has good, easy to read explanations and descriptions of the weather products available. It's a great overview of the information out there.

There are some wonderful books available on weather and meteorology for pilots. The Internet has sites for aviation weather.

This winter, enjoy the weather channel and along with that, visit the Flight Service Station in Hawthorne or Riverside. Read one of those new books on weather for pilots. And everytime, get a real weather briefing from someone who speaks your language, the language of flying.